

Lt. Col. William “Opie” Rothermel

Commanding Officer, VX-31

Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division



Lieutenant Colonel William “Opie” Rothermel was born into a Navy family in November 1973, in Adak, Alaska. His father, Captain Richard Rothermel (USN Retired), and mother, Eunice Rothermel, RN, raised him and his sister across five duty stations and six states.

After graduating from St. Olaf College with a B.A. in Mathematics and Physics, he was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in May 1995. He completed the Marine Corps Basic School and married Amy Katherine Black Rothermel, Au.D., in May 1996. After the birth of their first son and earning his Naval Aviator wings in April 1998, he headed to AV-8B Fleet training in MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina.

Between April 1998 and February 2004, Captain Rothermel completed AV-8B training with the VMAT-203 Hawks and two tours of duty as an Ace of Spades in VMA-231. Here he distinguished himself with aviation designations of Mission Commander, Weapons Training Officer, and Advanced Landing Signal Officer. He conducted AV-8B operations as part of the Marine Expeditionary Units onboard three amphibious ships and deployed to Iwakuni, Japan and the Western Pacific.

He then reported to VX-9 at NAWS China Lake to serve as Operational Test Director for all AV-8B programs, where he completed Weapons and Tactics Instructor training with MAWTS-1 in MCAS Yuma, AZ, and performed concurrent duties as Quality Assurance Officer.

Major Rothermel attended the United States Air Force Test Pilot School as the class leader for class 07A. Just after the adoption of their second son, he graduated TPS, earning both the Leithen-Tittle Award as top graduating pilot, and the Aaron C. “C-Dot” George Award, voted by his classmates as the one classmate they wanted on their team when the chips were down, the student who best exemplified the warrior-focused attitude to field the best weapon systems possible.

He returned to NAWS China Lake to serve three and a half years at AV-8B Joint Systems Support Activity, as an AV-8B project officer and F/A-18 EF project pilot at VX-31, from January 2008 to June 2011. His flight test accomplishments included shipboard wind envelope expansion testing, Terrain Awareness Warning System integration, five block upgrade software qualification tests, first article carriage and release, propulsion system characterization testing and multiple developmental item hardware and software flight tests. He was named 2009 Test Pilot of the Year.

Lieutenant Colonel Rothermel served next as Deputy Program Manager for USMC Programs and Assistant Program Manager Systems Engineering (PMA-257) for the AV-8B Harrier, from July 2011 through May 2014 in Patuxent River, Maryland.

In May 2014, Opie reported back to VX-31 as the Chief Test Pilot. He has been responsible for the oversight and supervision of test planning, test risk management, test execution, and test reporting of F/A-18, AV-8B, AH-1, UH-1, H-60, and T-39 programs.

Lieutenant Colonel Rothermel has earned two Meritorious Service Medals, the Navy Commendation Medal, and three Navy-Marine Corps Achievement Medals. He has accumulated over 2000 flight hours and is a member of the Society of Experimental Test Pilots. He holds a Master of Science in Operations Research from the Florida Institute of Technology and a Master of Science in Flight Test Engineering from Air University.